

Intertwined by **tellmewhatreal**

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Intertwined

Her entry into society hadn't exactly been smooth sailing.

She had been excited to go to school, to say the least. The date had been marked on the calendar hanging on the wall, and she would constantly check how many days there were left until she could begin her life as a normal teenager. Then The Day had finally arrived, and trembling with barely contained excitement, she had hopped out of the truck and hurried to her friends waiting for her at the school entrance. But in the afternoon, when he had pulled up in front of the school to pick her up, she had sat there on the curb looking downright defeated. When he had called out her name (which was Jane, by her choice, although the kids still persistently called her El), she had walked over to the truck, shoulders slumped, dragging her feet. The whole drive home she had stared out of the window and his questions had been met with shrugs and one-word answers. It hadn't been until that evening that she had spoken. "Everything was hard," she had said, poking at the mashed potatoes on her plate with her fork.

The things she had then described hadn't come as a surprise to him. The weird looks from other kids. Teachers with little patience for her limited understanding of vocabulary. The exhaustion from having to process unfamiliar words all day and trying and failing to form sentences that made sense to others. She was certainly enthusiastic about learning, probably more so than any other student in the school, but the day had been too overwhelming. And it had apparently ended with her hiding in a bathroom stall, trying to keep her anxiety in check.

So the first day had been hard, and so had the weeks after that. He had been aware that the kid needed to see and experience a lot more human interaction in order to get better at it. So he had started taking her out a lot more, trying to ignore the fear twisting his guts every time she was out in public. They would simply walk around the town, go out to eat or sometimes go to the movies. On Saturdays they would get groceries for the following week.

This Saturday was no different. She was pushing the shopping cart

and scanning the shelves, searching for a cereal brand that she hadn't tried yet. He was in the vegetable aisle, cursing the lack of carrots, the only vegetable she would eat without coaxing. She returned to him with two boxes of cereal in the cart. "Can I have two?"

"I'm not made of money, you know."

She looked puzzled. "I know."

"I mean... Never mind. Just, maybe try to pick one? The next paycheck is coming next week, we're gonna have to skimp until then." The truth was, he was saving up so that they could afford to move to a real house with room for them both. But he didn't want to tell her until he was sure he could actually make it happen.

"Fine." She was about to take the other box back when someone called out Jim's name. They both turned around and saw a red-haired woman approach them.

"Jim Hopper! I recognized you immediately."

He had no idea who the woman was.

"You don't remember me, do you?" She seemed a little surprised, yet amused.

"Uh... Remind me?"

She smirked. "Senior year, we used to drive up to the hill in your car and... enjoy the scenery."

Then he definitely remembered. Flustered, he cleared his throat. "Susan! Yes, of course I remember. What are you doing here? In Hawkins, I mean."

"It's my mother's birthday and she's having this huge extravaganza. I think half the town is invited," she laughed.

Jane was still standing there, holding the box of cereal and silently observing them.

Susan kept glancing between Jane and him, obviously waiting for

him to introduce her.

"And who's this pretty lady?" she finally asked.

"Oh, this is Jane. She is my daughter." He uttered the last words slowly and uncertainly, as he always did whenever someone asked about her. He still hadn't gotten used to the phrase.

The woman frowned. "Really? I had no idea you had a kid. Even my mom has never mentioned it, and she knows everything that goes on in this town."

Relying on the evasion tactic he had successfully used with nosy people for the last few weeks, he only shrugged as a response.

She turned to Jane and extended her hand. "Well, it's very nice to meet you, Jane." The girl stared at the extended hand with a confused look and glanced at Jim. He mimed a handshake and she finally shook the hand limply.

"She's a bit shy," he lied.

"Wow, she really hasn't taken after you, then," she laughed.

He could sense the conversation heading to a very awkward direction and he needed to end it. "Well, it was great seeing you. We're in a bit of a hurry, so we need to continue our shopping."

The abrupt ending to the conversation earned him an odd look from the woman. "Right, of course. Actually I'm in a bit of a hurry too, I just need to grab baking soda for my mom." She seemed to contemplate for a while. "But hey, I'm going to be in town for a few days, so if you want to grab a drink or something..."

There was no way he was going to spend an evening being interrogated about his life, so he tried to come up with a believable excuse. "Oh. Well, you know, I'm going to be a bit busy with work and... Jane. You know, father-daughter stuff."

She obviously saw right through his bullshit explanation, but thankfully let it go. "Right, of course. Anyway, it was fun to see you again. And it was nice meeting you, Jane." She gave them both one

last (and very confused) look before heading to the other side of the store.

"Why are we in a hurry?" Jane asked him as she watched her walk away.

"We're not," he said with a lowered voice.

"You lied then."

He groaned. "It was just a teeny tiny white lie, don't get too hung up on it. What's next on our shopping list?"

She kept looking at him with a slightly judgmental look. It was annoying as hell. "Let this one go, and I'll let you have two boxes of cereal. Deal?"

She contemplated a while. "Yes." He then shook her hand to seal the deal (and also for practice).

She tossed the box into the cart and started to spell out the next item on their shopping list.

He realized that in the span of five minutes he had lied, used bribery and overall spectacularly failed at acting like a normal human being. As usual, he started to wallow, thinking he was a horrible influence on his kid if he couldn't even get through a simple conversation with dignity.

While he followed her around amidst his angst spiral, Jane collected everything they needed (minus the carrots) and they went to the register. As usual, Jim handed Jane a bunch of bills so that she could handle the transaction and went to pack the groceries. While the cashier waited for Jane to count the bills, she asked what the duo had planned for the weekend.

Jane handed her the cash after triple-checking she had counted the money correctly. "You know, father-daughter stuff," she parroted his earlier words. "It's going to be a busy weekend, apparently." She threw him a mocking look.

Even though he was being made fun of, he couldn't help but chuckle

at her surprisingly subtle jab. His kid was starting to get the hang of it after all.

Jim wondered what his life had become. He had led a simple life before: going to work, getting off work, having a drink or ten, maybe having a lady friend over. Then he would wake up in the morning and do the same thing all over again. It had been a safe and familiar loop. But now he was in uncharted territory: standing in the front of a classroom, trying to inspire kids to "find a suitable career path". That was what Ms. Hoffman, one of Jane's teachers, had said when she had ambushed him in the hallway of the school and begged him to take part in career day. If he had been asked three years ago, he would have never agreed, but now all it had taken had been the magic words "*Jane would be so thrilled to have you there*". Ms. Hoffman was surprisingly good at manipulation.

So he was there as promised, cursing himself for agreeing to this, and Jane was sitting in the back row, looking amused and maybe a little weirded out by the fact that he was in her classroom. The teacher introduced him to the class and gestured him to take over.

He took a few steps forward, feeling like a giant in the small classroom. He placed his hat on the teacher's desk and started talking, describing his duties as a police chief and what a typical work day was like. He kept it short because he desperately wanted to get the hell out of there. Of course the sadistic Ms. Hoffman wouldn't let him.

"Thank you, chief Hopper! What a fascinating, and most of all important job. Now, I'm sure the kids have a lot of questions to ask you," she said from the side of the room.

"Uh, yeah sure, go ahead," he glanced at the students, who mostly looked bored.

A boy in the front row piped up immediately. "Have you ever killed anyone?"

Some of the other boys snickered, and he noticed Jane roll her eyes in the back row. The teacher threw Jim an apologizing look. He then

had a hunch.

He headed slowly toward the boy's desk. "What's your name, kid?"

"Brian."

Bingo. This was *the* Brian who apparently kept sending idiotic notes to Jane during class. They weren't even clever, just mocking remarks about her clothing or curly hair. When he had found the pieces of paper between her biology textbook, he had forced her to tell him the asshole's name, but she had pleaded him not to contact the school. "*I don't care about them*," she had said. But he knew she did care, and now he could do something about it.

He stopped in front of the boy's desk and looked contemplatively out of the window, ignoring his question. "You know, I've been doing this job for a long time. And I like to think that I've become pretty good at reading people. Something I've noticed over the years is that it's pretty easy to predict how people will turn out."

He leaned on the kid's desk with both hands. "Some people start veering off course early on. They think that what they're doing is just innocent fun, like maybe teasing others at school, enjoying the power trip. But usually, that's exactly how it starts. That leads to whole another level of stupidity, and before they know it, they're being charged with car theft or drunk driving or worse by the time they're 20."

He leaned down, towering over the boy (who was trying to act like he wasn't intimidated, but he could see that was exactly what he was). "That's why whenever I spot kids doing something stupid, I intervene. It's not too late for them, they can still change course. And a very good way to change that course is to, I don't know, stop going out of your way to terrorize the people around you. These people include, but are not limited to, the police chief's daughter." He gave the kid his most frightening stare. "Surely you understand what I'm saying?"

For a second the boy defiantly held his head up high, but then nodded and averted his gaze, blush creeping up his neck.

"Wonderful," he said with an overly chipper tone and straightened himself. "Any other questions?"

"Actually, I think we're out of time," the now very nervous-looking Ms. Hoffman hurried to say, trying to get things under control again. "But thank you so much for taking the time to visit us, this has been very enlightening."

"It was my pleasure," he stated sweetly and picked up his hat. One glance at the back of the classroom confirmed that his daughter was blushing furiously, but she didn't seem embarrassed, only amused. He placed the hat on his head and headed to the door. "I'll be home at five-one-five, Jane," he called out without looking back and strode out into the hallway.

Jane didn't like guns. It was perfectly understandable, considering that she'd had quite a few guns pointed at her in her lifetime. Whenever his gun was somewhere in the house, she would avoid being in its vicinity. It most likely stirred some unpleasant memories in her.

He wondered if it was the worst idea in the history of mankind, but he figured that if he showed her how guns worked, maybe she wouldn't feel so uncomfortable with one in the house. On the other hand, he was about to teach a traumatized teenager not totally in control of her psychic powers how to use a firearm. Someone might have said he was insane. But he knew that despite her explosive tendencies she was also extremely detail-oriented. If he explained something to her thoroughly, she would be smart about it.

"You want me to use the gun?" she asked incredulously when he broached the subject.

He gave her a pointed look. "Certainly not. I'm just going to show you how to handle it safely and load it and stuff. You know, the mechanics of it. Sit, watch and learn", he tapped the seat next to him.

She sat down hesitantly at their brand new kitchen table next to him. "Okay. First of all, if you handle a gun, *always* make sure that the safety is on. See this here? When it's on, you can't accidentally shoot

anyone."

"What if I need to shoot someone?"

"You won't need to. Ever."

"You can't know."

He sighed. "Well, if push comes to shove, you're perfectly able to take someone down with your God-given abilities. So leave the shooting to me."

He could sense the gears turning in her head. "'If push comes to shove', it means that a situation gets so bad that it calls for desperate measures."

Her expression became even more perplexed. "Measures?"

He ran a hand over his face. "It has a different meaning... You know what, let's not get into that right now, we need to concentrate on this. Okay, here's what you would do if you had to use this." He then showed her how to place the bullets in and how to load the gun.

"How often do you have to use it?" she asked, closely watching his movements.

"Pretty much never, not much happens around here that requires shooting. Except, you know..." He trailed off but she picked up on his meaning and nodded in understanding.

"Can I try shoot with it?" she asked after a moment of silence.

He raised his eyebrow at the unexpected question.

"Not living things," she hurried to add. "Just... I want see how it feels."

He contemplated for a while. "Sorry, kid. This is my service pistol. You know, for work only. We can't use it for fun."

She nodded again and fiddled with a loose bullet.

"But I do have a rifle in the garage. You interested in that?"

Before they knew it, they were standing at the edge of the nearby field, Jane placing empty beer cans on a weathered fence. They took their position at a proper distance from it.

"Okay, you ready?"

"Yes." She held out her arms, looking concentrated and serious.

"Stand straight, feet a bit further apart," he poked at her feet with his own foot and then placed the rifle in her arms. "It will kick back, hard, so be ready for that. Take a deep breath before you pull the trigger. Absolutely no sudden movements." He placed earmuffs on her head and took a step back.

She breathed in and out in an exaggerated manner. Her finger closed around the trigger and her head started to turn away in anticipation of the shot.

"No no no, eyes *open* and *forward*," he gestured towards the fence. "You need to see your target."

She gave him a slightly impatient look, but did as she was told. She took that deep breath again and kept her eyes fixated on the fence.

The shot rang loudly through the air, making flocks of birds sprint from the tree line. Jane looked a bit startled by the force of the shot, but after a second she burst into laughter. Clearly exhilarated and pumped with adrenaline, she couldn't stop laughing, and it made him laugh too. She hadn't hit any of the cans, not by a long shot, but they couldn't care less. At that moment she was emanating pure joy and it was perfect.

"That settles it, we are so enrolling you into the police academy the minute you turn 21." He ruffled her hair, a bit out of breath from the laughing.

Jim was at his desk smoking a cigarette and talking on the phone with a very distraught George Henderson, who was reporting that his lawn ornaments had gone missing during the night. Again. "This is

the third time this has happened, George. Maybe you should consider not having lawn ornaments?" he asked tiredly. As the man started to rant about never giving in to the shithheads who vandalized him, Flo appeared in the doorway. "Hop, your daughter is here."

He glanced at the clock on the wall and groaned. "She's supposed to be at school," he said, holding his hand over the receiver.

"Well, she's not. She wants to see you, over here," Flo told him and gestured him to follow her. He ended the call abruptly, promising the man that someone would come over to deal with his crisis.

He was already preparing the lecture he was about to give her in his head, until he entered the room and saw her sitting in one of the guest chairs by the entrance, cradling her winter hat in her hands. When he got closer, he spotted some movement in the hat.

"Uh, Jane? What have you got there?" he asked carefully, suddenly worried that he would have to deal with yet another monstrous creature from the upside down. He sat down on the chair next to hers. She shifted the hat so that he could take a look. Thankfully, it wasn't an otherworldly creature. It was a tiny bird. Its wing was broken and one of its legs was twisted in an odd position. She looked up at him with the most hopeful expression he'd ever seen on anyone. "Can you fix her?"

Suddenly he could feel everyone's eyes on him. The officers and Flo were all curiously watching this scene unfold from their desks. It made him anxious. "Powell, Callahan, George Henderson called again. You know the drill."

The men begrudgingly made their way out and Jim looked at the bird one more time. It twitched slightly when he gently poked at it, but it wasn't actually moving. It wasn't even chirping. It was obviously as good as dead but she still thought he could somehow bring it back to life. He would've been touched if it hadn't been so damn tragic.

"Where did you find it?" he asked gently.

"In the school yard. I don't know why she's hurt." She stroked the bird's feathers lightly. "What do we do?"

There was that look again. He sighed. "Look, Jane, I don't think we can make it better. It's too badly hurt."

The tears fell immediately. She was sobbing and heartbroken and he had no idea what to do. He placed a comforting hand on her back. "If there was any way I could help it, I would." She sniffed and wiped at her eyes and nose (with the hands she had handled the bird with, he realized, but now was probably not the time to send her to wash her hands). At a loss at what to do, he glanced over at Flo, but she was, too, wiping tears from her face. Truth be told, he was pretty close to shedding a few tears himself. He ended up hugging her and whispering (hopefully) soothing words to her until the sobbing stopped. Figuring that she was too upset to return to school, he decided to take her straight home.

Later that night, the bird having been put out of its misery and Jane being asleep in her room, he lied on the couch with a beer in his hand, thinking about what had happened. He didn't know why she'd had such a strong reaction to the bird and it bothered him. He suspected it had something to do with the lab. He had certainly noticed something was off before: whenever she saw a stray cat crossing their yard or a dog being walked on the street, she got that sad, faraway look in her eyes. He hadn't asked her about it, mostly because he was afraid of opening a floodgate that couldn't be closed. Annoyed with himself for handling things so badly, he finished his beer with one gulp and got up from the couch, his back cracking in the process. On the way to his room, he peaked in Jane's to make sure she was really asleep (she would sometimes pretend to go to sleep but in reality read a book under the covers with a flashlight). He lingered in her doorway for a while, the alcohol running in his veins making him emotional. He had probably handled some things badly, he thought. But she had trusted him enough to come to him when she had been upset, so he must have done something right, too. That thought made him smile.

The flying glass missed his head only by a few inches when it hit the wall and shattered to pieces. "Hey, what did we talk about?" he barked angrily, pointing at their revised list of '*don't be stupid*' rules pinned to the living room wall.

He really didn't need this today. She had that infuriatingly stubborn look on her face and he knew this fight was going to be a hellish one. He had only informed her that she couldn't go out with the others since she would have to study for her math test, and things had inexplicably escalated from there.

She didn't answer his question. He marched to the list to emphasize his point.

"*I won't use my powers to lash out*," he read out loud. "This looks awfully like your own handwriting. I distinctly remember us both agreeing to these rules. So where is this stupidity coming from?"

She was absolutely seething. "I am not stupid!" she spat out.

"Oh yeah? Because I'm thinking that a smart person would know better than to use their scary-ass powers to hurt other people out of spite. That's what normal people do, they *control their emotions*. We've been having this conversation over and over again for, what, two years now, and you still can't grasp this? Seriously?"

In the back of his mind he knew he had delivered her a low blow. But he couldn't concentrate on that right now because he needed to win this stare-off they were currently engaged in. Seeing the rage flash in her eyes he fully expected her to hurl the TV at him or something, and quite frankly, he probably deserved it at this point. Instead, she stormed out of the house, slamming the door shut behind her with a flick of her wrist.

"Shit." He walked over to the window and watched her ride off with her bike. Slowly his words started to sink in. He was painfully aware of the other kids laughing behind her back and calling her a weirdo or a freak at school, making her feel like she didn't belong. He'd thought that things had gotten better since the beginning, since she hadn't really mentioned anything to him for a while, but the Wheeler kid had told him the truth. Frustrated, he had briefly even entertained the idea of letting her break rule number three on their list (*I will never ever use my powers at school*) so that she could make sure no one ever bothered her again. It made him sick that she had to listen to that shit, and yet, here he was, berating her for not being normal.

He considered going after her but decided against it. He wouldn't get through to her when she was like this. So he decided to wait the storm out, trying to ignore the all-too familiar thought nagging in the back of his mind: *what if she doesn't come back*.

She, of course, did come back. It was 9.58 p.m., and as he was pacing in the kitchen and considering sending his officers out to look for her, he heard the door open. She stepped in, briefly glanced at him and with her head bowed down closed the door gingerly (and manually this time). She was clearly expecting to be yelled at. Feeling nothing but relief, he closed the distance between them and hugged her tightly.

"I'm sorry," she mumbled quietly into his shirt and hugged him back.

"I'm sorrier. I was a moron."

She gave a small laugh and looked up at him. "I think we both were a bit stupid. Again."

"I'll say," he chuckled and let go of her to look her straight in the eye. "Hey, uh... I know I said some hurtful things. I need you to know I didn't mean any of it. It can't be easy, trying to learn to control something so... uncontrollable."

"I don't do it on purpose. When I get mad, it's like I can't think very well."

He chuckled. "Hey, I can totally relate. Speaking of which," he guided her by the shoulders to the list on the wall, "I added something in my column." There, under the much-protested '*I won't smoke inside the house*', he had written '*I will handle fights like an adult*'. She smiled and gave him a side hug.

He threw his arm around her shoulder. "Where did you go, by the way?"

"To the diner."

"You were at the diner for three hours?"

"Mm-hmm."

"Do I dare ask what you ate?"

"Waffles and two milkshakes. And coffee."

He groaned. "Great. That won't mess with your sleep at all." He then remembered what had caused the fight to begin with. "On the other hand, now you'll have all night to study for your test."

The next day they agreed to add another rule in her column: '*No coffee after 5 p.m.*'

"I'm bored."

He cracked one eye open and found her sitting on the edge of his bed. He glanced at the clock on the nightstand, closed his eyes and flung his arm over his eyes. "Why on earth are you up at 6.50 on a Saturday morning?"

She shrugged. "I'm not tired."

"Congratulations. I, on the other hand, am very tired."

"There's nothing to do around here." She was whispering now, as if that would bother him less.

"Homework?"

"I did it yesterday," she said exasperatedly and flopped down on her stomach on the edge of the bed.

"Of course you did." She must have been the only teenager in Hawkins who voluntarily did her homework on a Friday night. "Well... How about mowing the lawn? That would be super useful."

He was joking, but judging by her silence she seemed to actually contemplate it. "I don't know how to use the machine," she said after a while.

He peeked at her from under his arm. "The lawn mower?" She nodded. "It's not hard. I can show you."

She looked way too excited about a lawn mower. He seriously needed to find her some hobbies. "But not now. I think our neighbors wouldn't be so thrilled about our Saturday-morning lawn-mowing."

"Their houses are far away. They won't care."

He groaned and opened his eyes, obviously not getting any sleep anymore. "Fine. But breakfast first, then manual labor."

"I already made coffee!" She sprinted out of the bed victoriously and disappeared into the kitchen.

His mind wandered, again, a few years back to when he had been free to sleep until noon without anyone needing anything from him. But thinking about it now, he didn't miss it one bit. He quite enjoyed his life just the way it was.